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Drone Prevents Landing of Medical Helicopter

A man in Ohio was arrested last week after operating a drone that interfered with the landing of a medical helicopter responding to a motor vehicle crash. The man was allegedly filming the incident scene. The helicopter landed safely once the drone was on the ground.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is developing new policies on the use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS). Current policies are in limbo due to a recent ruling stating there was no law stopping commercial use of UAS and that the government's policy notes had not been written as part of a formal rule making process. However, the FAA website states "anyone who wants to fly an aircraft - manned or unmanned - in U.S. airspace needs some level of FAA approval."

Several states have more stringent laws on civilian "hobby" drone use and even stricter laws governing their use by law enforcement or others within the Emergency Services Sector. This close call in Ohio highlights a growing trend. First responders need to be aware that UAS may be present at incidents and plan accordingly.

(Source: FAA)

Boston Use of Social Media Deemed a Success

A paper by the National Institute of Justice praises Boston Police Department's (BPD) use of social media (PDF, 342 Kb) during the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing, saying Twitter use during the unfolding events "demonstrated the level of trust and interaction that a department and a community can attain online."

The paper looks at how social media is used as a means of community engagement as opposed to an investigation tool. While both are possible, the authors feel the former is a more valuable asset to building public trust with law enforcement and using social media for the latter is more likely to damage it.

Within 10 minutes of the detonations, BPD was calling for use of social media to tell the public what steps the police were taking. BPD used its official Twitter account to relay road closures; reassure the public; and correct misinformation reported online by the media and individuals about casualties, suspects, and other incorrect reports. BPD tweets became the go-to source of information during this event.

After the two suspects were officially identified, BPD released their pictures and video via Twitter, which were resent thousands of times each. During the manhunt for the surviving suspect, Twitter was once again used to ask the public not to compromise officer safety by streaming video of the hunt. By the time the suspect was in custody the BPD Twitter account had over 300,000 followers.

Used properly, this communication platform can deliver very timely, needed information directly to the public without having to be funneled through media outlets first. This incident shows how emergency services departments can use targeted social media to deliver accurate safety information right into the hands of those who need it most when it counts: the public.

(Source: NIJ)

Fire Fighter Fatality Map From NIOSH

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) combined its fatality investigations with incident data from the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) to develop the Fire Fighter Fatality Map. The project has three goals:

1. Identify fire fighter fatalities being investigated by NIOSH;
2. Identify completed investigations with links to final NIOSH reports; and
3. Provide interactive map, tabular statistics, and case listing access to data on all U.S. fire fighter on-duty deaths.

The map and database are searchable by date; age, gender, and rank of deceased; type of department; type of incident; and cause of death. The map is updated when new data becomes available.

The search options allow users to hone in on specific conditions, situations, geographical location, or other criteria as needed to better study or search fire fatality information.

(Source: Fire Fighter Fatality Map)

National Biosurveillance Integration Center

Department of Homeland Security's Office of Health Affairs (OHA) announced the opening of its National Biosurveillance Integration Center (NBIC) (PDF, 191 Kb) earlier this month. The NBIC was originally established in 2007 by Congress to coordinate the nation's many biosurveillance efforts.

The NBIC's mission is to support government response to biological events through early detection, identification, and better tracking. To achieve this, the NBIC offers daily monitoring products on national and international concerns; access to open-source data collections; and access to weekly interagency biosurveillance calls.

This presentation to the National Governor's Association (PDF, 2.9 Mb) discusses in greater length the data sources the NBIC uses, the Biosurveillance Common Operating Picture, collaboration efforts with state and local health officials, activation protocol, and who else OHA partners with in this endeavor. Contact information is on the NBIC website.

(Source: OHA)